

Step 3, Discovering Strengths

Get to know the family/individual in positive ways: strengths, values, beliefs, cultures, traditions, choices, stories and the dreams they have for themselves and their loved ones. After you've heard the family's story from their point of view and learned about their assets and preferences, and you have their written permission, review other potentially useful sources of information and talk to significant current and historic resource people.

Strengths → Strategies → Success

Situation: Annamaria is 3 years old and was adopted by her parents from a Russian orphanage. She is doing well with her new family, except when she suddenly runs into a wall, head first.

- **Outcome:** Annamaria's head will be safe not hurt.
- **Needs:** To be absolutely sure that she is loved and that she has a forever family.
- **Strength:** TV is new to her but she is spellbound by Mr. Rogers¹.
- **Strategy:** Annamaria and her parents are cutting out pictures that remind all three of them that Mr. Rogers likes them just the way they are and that they love each other in the same, exact way.

Situation: Marco, 15 years old, is at risk for gang involvement.

- **Outcome:** Marco will not participate in/get arrested for gang-related or other illegal activities.
- **Needs:** To connect current actions with potentially good and bad consequences.
- **Strength:** He loves rap and hip hop music.
- **Strategy:** With an adult mentor, he's researching the history of his favorite music, particularly the untimely and as yet unsolved

¹ Mister Roger's Neighborhood, PBS Television, 1968, starring Fred Rogers

murders of Tupac Shakur² and Biggie Smalls³ in light of the East Coast/West Coast rap conflict. Marco is also drawing a thread from there to the current conflict between Nasir Jones and Jay-Z, exploring unnecessary hostilities and tragic results.

Situation: Alan, a broken hearted guy, whose “drink of choice” was always Diet Coke, attempted suicide using pills and Jack Daniels, when his wife left him for her 19 year old lover, whose child she is carrying.

- **Outcome:** Alan will remain alive (no suicide threats, gestures or attempts).
- **Needs:** Safe ways to experience tough emotions; exercise, the chance to be around happier people.
- **Strength:** Alan loves country western music.
- **Strategies:** When his boys watch videos, Alan listens to Montgomery Gentry sing “Hell Yeah⁴,” Gary Allan singing “Songs About Rain⁵” and Joe Nichols singing “Brokenheartsville⁶.” Alan also participates in country western line dancing classes at a local community center where the male/female ratio⁷ of student dancers is 1/5.

Situation: Lupe, a lonely 11-year-old girl with low self esteem, sees herself as very much the outsider.

- **Outcomes:** Lupe reports that she is a good person; Lupe has at least 1 friend.
- **Needs:** To see her strengths clearly; to evaluate potential candidates for friendship
- **Strength:** The one thing sure to engage her interest is the Harry Potter series⁸. She actually glows when she tells the stories to her

² Tupac Shakur: June 16, 1971 - September 13, 1996, Bronx, New York

³ Biggie Smalls: May 21, 1972 - March 9, 1997, Brooklyn, New York

⁴ “Hell Yeah” by Montgomery Gentry, Album: My Town, 2002

⁵ “Songs About Rain” by Gary Allan, Album: See If I Care, 2003

⁶ “Brokenheartsville” by Joe Nichols, Album: Man With A Memory, 2002

⁷ David Lewis, All Church Home, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁸ *Harry Potter* series written by J.K. Rowling, 1998-2004

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- parents and barely looks up when she reads the books – over and over again.
- **Strategies:** With adult help, Lupe is talking and thinking about how the things that made Harry different also made him special. And how, although, some ignored him and put him down because of that difference, others admired him for it. She is also paying close attention to who Harry picked for friends and writing about what she learns from that in her journal.⁹

Discovering Family Strengths, Cultures, Traditions, Preferences and Values

- The best thing we can do for people is to acknowledge and respect their value.
- Culture often dictates values, behavior and a host of other things. Be a willing student and learn each person's/each family's culture.
- Despite difficult circumstances and challenging issues, there is good in almost all people. It's not always easy to see, but it's usually there. Look for it.
- You don't really know a person if you only know what's wrong with him/her.
- When human beings are in trouble, our assets, not our deficits, get us through difficult times.
- Family, friends, and faith can be powerful forces that strengthen and comfort people, whatever their circumstances.
- People build their lives on resources, choices and preferences, not pathology.
- People who are busy doing good things have less time to misbehave.

⁹ James Wallace, All Church Home, Fort Worth, Texas.

- Positive, new, alternative behaviors are easier to learn when they are based on personal and family assets and choices.
- Remember that real life stabilizes us. Don't withhold it.
- When people are troubled by bad thoughts, they feel bad. Building a menu of good thoughts can help. "An idle mind is the devil's playground."¹⁰
- You can't really respect someone's cultural beliefs unless you first understand them.¹¹

Starting with Strengths

- Ask people about favorite activities, values, friends, family, hobbies, heroes, dreams and coping strategies.
- Listen to and observe them, and then test your conclusions.
- For every contact that requires, or is supported by, documentation, give the people you're writing about a copy of what you write. Carbon paper or carbonless forms will simplify this as they create instant copies.
- Ask to hear child, adult and family legends, memories and stories. Listen carefully.
- Ask to see family pictures. Depressed, sad people don't usually ask to have their pictures taken, so pictures tend to represent happier moments.¹²
- Notice what people do when they feel overwhelmed.

¹⁰ Peg Grealish, my mother, Brownsville and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

¹¹ Don Burge, friend and colleague, The Pressley Ridge Schools, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and Maryland

¹² Narell Joyner, friend and colleague, personal communication

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- Ask them if it, whatever “it” may be, ever goes well, and if so, how.
- Notice the décor, if you’re visiting the family home, and see if it gives you any information about what the family values.
- Observe what people wear – clothes, jewelry, etc. – and see if that gives you additional information.

Sample Questions for Adults

1. Is there anything you believe in that gets you through tough times?
2. How do you blow off steam?
3. How would you spend your leisure time if you could choose freely?
4. How have you managed to cope with (whatever he/she is coping with) so far?
5. What would give you and your family a happier life?
6. What were you like as a child?
7. Who do you consider family?
8. Did you/do you look up to somebody? Do you have a hero? Is there someone you admire?
9. What is your family (kin and non-blood kin) like?
10. Do you have a favorite relative? Best friend?
11. Who do you call when...? (Adapt a potential, locally relevant crisis, A/C broken, ice storm, broke, fired, dumped, angry.)
12. What is your favorite song, band, movie, TV show, book or story?

13. What are you proud of? What is the best thing you have ever done?
14. What kind of mom or dad do you want to be? (For parents and possible future parents)
15. Do you have a favorite holiday or celebration?
16. Do you and your family have any special customs or ceremonies?
17. What are your hopes and dreams for yourself? Your loved ones?
18. What are your most important values?
19. What expectations do you have for the children in your life? In your home? What do you expect from adults?
20. What are your best qualities as a person? As a parent? As a relative? As a partner? As a friend?

OR

If you offer less intensive services or if, for whatever reason, you need a shorter assessment:

Brief Strengths Assessment for Adults

1. Is there anything you believe in that gets you through tough times?
2. How do you blow off steam?
3. How would you spend your leisure time if you could choose freely?
4. How have you managed to cope with (whatever he/she is coping with) so far?
5. What would give you and your family a happier life?

Sample Questions for Children

1. What was the best day you ever had? Why?
2. What are the best things about your parents? Your family?
3. Who is your hero (actual or fictional)?
4. What are the best things about your life right now?
5. How do you blow off steam?
6. What are the best parts of school?
7. Who or what do you think is cool?
8. What is your own best thing?
9. What do you want to be when you get older? What do you want to be like?
10. Who admires you? Why?
11. What are your favorite celebrations? Favorite times of the year?
12. What do you do for fun?
13. Who can you count on, no matter what? What do you believe in, no matter what?
14. Who do you think understands you best?
15. What do you do when you have free time and the choice of how to spend it?
16. Do you have any dreams you hope will come true some day?

17. What's your favorite gift you've ever been given? Given to someone else?¹³
18. What is your favorite song, band, movie, TV show, story? Why?
19. What kind of a friend are you? What kinds of friends do you have? Want to have?
20. If you could change anything about your life, what would you change?

OR

If you offer less intensive services or if, for whatever reason, you need a shorter assessment:

Brief Strengths Assessment for Children

1. What was the best day you ever had? Why?
2. What are the best things about your parents? Your family?
3. Who is your hero (actual or fictional)?
4. What are the best things about your life right now?
5. How do you blow off steam?



¹³ Chequita Parker, colleague, Program Uplift, Eastfield Ming Quong, Campbell, Los Gatos, San Jose and Sacramento, California

Format for Recording Family Strengths, Desired Outcomes, Needs and Potential Resource People

<p>Strengths, Cultures, Assets, Beliefs and Preferences</p>	<p>Important Outcomes: What is to be <u>produced</u> by the plan?</p>
<p>Individual/Family Needs (not services)</p>	<p>Resource People/Possible Family Team Members</p>
<p>Questions/Comments¹⁴:</p>	

¹⁴ Narell Joyner, friend and colleague, personal communication, Karen XXXX CYFD. N.M., Pat Sandau-Beckler, © 2008. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED by E. M. GREALISH. The Wraparound Process Curriculum: Orientation 2 – How It Works. Used with permission only by North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services.

Step 4, Selecting & Including Potential Resource People and/or Family Team Members

Get to know who the person's/family's people are: friends, family, neighbors, mentors, sponsors and others who are involved with the family/individual. Learn who could be or become positive supports for them. With the family/ individual's written permission, reach out to people who can bring needed skills and services closer to the family/ individual.

Once signed, specific releases of information are in place, contact anyone selected as resource people or for the Family Team and get their input on individual and family strengths, desired Outcomes, Needs, and additional resource people. Read the file and review any other information as it becomes available.

Resource People and Family Team Members Can...

- Keep hope alive.
- Acknowledge and respect the values of their loved one, client, or neighbor.
- Build capacities: support, help, skills, contacts, resources.
- Solve problems in comfortable, practical ways.
- Share complex tasks and get things done, without overwhelming anybody.

- Respond to crises and plan for possible emergencies.
- Celebrate successes, even “baby steps”¹⁵.

On Family Teams and Resource People...

- All human relationships change and modify in shifting circumstances at different times. Family Teams do, too.
- Family Teams are as diverse as the people they support. Each one operates differently.
- Family Team members should be acknowledged, thanked and otherwise motivated to continue their helping roles.
- Serve food at Family Team meetings. People like to munch and think simultaneously.
- When needed resources are missing, identify their functions and augment the team as indicated, with the individual’s/family’s approval.

Family Teams and Resource People: **Who**

- Family, close friends, neighbors, spiritual leaders, service providers, volunteers, and colleagues.
- People who care, people who want to help, people who bring needed expertise.
- People who like the child, the adult or the family involved.
- The families’ people choose for themselves.

¹⁵ What About Bob?, Film, Dir. Frank Oz, with Bill Murray, Richard Dreyfuss, et. al., Buena Vista Productions, May 1991 (91 min).

- People who have or are willing to develop supportive and/or sociable relationships with those who need them.

Family Teams and Resource People: **Why**

- We are all experts on our own lives.
- We know our friends and relatives differently and better than even the savviest experts.
- Sometimes our friends and family really do know best.
- We need each other.
- Things are tough all over.
- “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”¹⁶
- “I am a rock, I am an island” (Paul Simon)¹⁷ didn’t work. (Ironically, sung with his soon-to-be ex-partner, Art Garfunkel)¹⁸

Family Teams and Resource People: **How**

- Ask about the people in the home, in photos, on refrigerator magnets, in lockets, and anywhere else you see evidence of potential Family Team members.

¹⁶ John Donne, “Devotions, XVII” The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne and The Complete Poetry of William Blake, eds. John Hayward and Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Random House, 1946) 322.

¹⁷ Paul Simon, Simon and Garfunkel’s Greatest Hits, Columbia CD CK-31350 6, June 14, 1972.

¹⁸ Don Burge, friend and colleague, The Pressley Ridge Schools, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and Maryland.

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- From the questions for adults (page 32) try #2, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, #16
- From the questions for children (page 34) try #1, #2, #3, #5, #6, #7, #10, #13, #14
- Ask if any service providers or professional resource people are involved with the family, or have been helpful in the past.
- When there are people who are mandated to have contact with and supervision of the individual or family, convince the person/s at the center of the process to include them. When people are reluctant to do so, remind them that system and community mandates don't disappear and must be addressed. Including those who have authority over what actually happens is the best way to resolve the issues that triggered the mandated response.
- As you begin to hear about important individual/family Outcomes and Needs, note where there are gaps in the support structure and offer suggestions to fill them.
- Notice also, if currently missing skills and capacities will likely be required to help meet unmet Needs and achieve priority Outcomes and suggest people who represent those skills for inclusion in the planning process
- Obtain from the individual, family, guardian or guardian entity specific signed releases of information that allow you to contact potential Family Team members and potential support people and that clearly state what information can be shared and with whom.
- Establish the time and date of the first meeting with the person/s at the center of the planning process and reach out to those identified for inclusion. Briefly explain the Wraparound Process, the role of the Family Team and the role they would play as a support person. Invite each person to attend a planning session or otherwise support the person or family in question.
- For people who can't attend a planning session, determine whether or not they can or should participate by sharing their opinions with

other team members (to be then represented at the actual meeting), being linked in electronically or receiving minutes of the meetings and/or copies of the updated plan.

- As you chat with potential Family Team members and support people, get their “take” on additional strengths and preferences and their general opinion on what Outcomes and unmet Needs might be important. Keep this brief and make sure you don’t get inadvertently involved in inappropriate side bar sessions or accidentally join what may become a faction on the emerging team or in the emerging plan